

China and the World – the World and China

Volume 4

Transcultural Perspectives on Global China

Edited by Barbara Mittler and Catherine Vance Yeh



China and the World – the World and China

Essays in Honor of Rudolf G. Wagner

Edited by
Barbara MITTLER,
Joachim & Natascha GENTZ
and Catherine Vance YEH

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Volume 4

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Of Sun, Moon, and Stars: Con-/Traversing China and the World in Salon Style

– in place of a Tabula Congratulatoria –

Barbara MITTLER

There have been quite a few occasions already when we did not offer a Festschrift to Rudolf G. Wagner – as he professed, repeatedly, at such occasions, that he does not really like them. But he likes to celebrate, and so, in November of 2001, on the occasion of his 60th birthday, we held a first celebration, organizing an international symposium, entitled “Measuring Historical Heat – Event, Performance and Impact in China and the West”, bringing many great scholars to Heidelberg, among them Tonio Hölscher, Roderick MacFarquhar, Merle Goldman, Wolfgang Kubin, Glenn Most, Rüdiger Bubner, Marianne Bastid-Bruguère, Edward Shaughnessy, Johannes Kurz, Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, Christoph Harbsmeier and many more. For the occasion, we composed a set of new lyrics for that famous Chinese revolutionary song “Dongfang hong” 东方红 (The East is Red) which shows his importance as master-teacher and nurturing sun to many of us:

东方红, 太阳升,
柏林出了个瓦格纳
他为学生莫幸福,
呼儿嘿哟,
他是学术大救星

Red is the East, the Sun is rising,
Berlin has brought forth a Wagner.
He brings happiness to his students,
hurray,
he is the great saviour of scholarship.

On the same occasion, Roderick MacFarquhar wrote the following lines which highlight another one of the planetary dimensions of Rudolf's character:

Shortly after I arrived at Harvard in the mid-1980s, I detected a twittering among some of my colleagues at the Fairbank Center... It was the sort of excitement that one detects among birds in the period immediately before an earthquake, or, to change the metaphor, the kind of awestruck anticipation that ancient Chinese astronomers would have exhibited as they awaited the arrival of Halley's Comet. But my American colleagues, unlike the Chinese of old, were not fearful about this auspicious portent, but very happy.

In due course, Comet Wagner arrived, but displaying two differences from Halley's Comet. First, Halley's Comet was made up of ice particles; Comet Wagner was fiery hot, a miniature atomic reactor. Second, Comet Wagner did not trail a stream of ice particles behind it; rather there was a considerable amount of hot air spewed out in front of it, accompanied by much gesticulation. Yet it was a comet I remember with fondness. Prior to subsequent appearances of Comet Wagner, I too twittered in anticipation.

More recently, I have noticed that the trajectory of Comet Wagner has changed, for it has shot across our skies far less frequently. Now that I have come to Heidelberg I have realized why. The comet has been transformed into a star, hovering permanently over this city. Star Wagner, wan sui. Long life to Star Wagner.

While at 60, he would be called the Sun and Star, 10 years later, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, we decided to organize a concert and recitation now circling around the moon, “the wise man’s light” (*junzi zhi guang* 君子之光), symbolic of the wise man’s pure and beautiful mind, and his companion, reflected in water, even on his longest journeys. Watching the moon can help the wise man travel both through space and through time. And surely, from a Chinese perspective, the moon is not a bad place to be, at all, as one grows older: it houses that arduous old man who will never cease to work and cut the cinnamon tree on the one hand, a worthy model – not least for Rudolf G. Wagner. And on the other hand, the moon is also home to that rabbit, who grinds the elixir of long life from that very cinnamon tree.

To me, personally, when I come to think of Rudolf Wagner and the moon, the first association I have is with that Evening Song „Der Mond ist aufgegangen” and especially with the third verse of this song which runs as follows:

Seht Ihr den Mond dort stehen?
Er ist nur halb zu sehen
Und ist doch rund und schön!
So sind wohl manche Sachen,
Die wir getrost belachen,
Weil unsere Augen sie nicht sehn.

Do you see the moon up there?
You can only see half of it,
even while it is round and beautiful.
And indeed this is true for many things
that we mock quite carelessly,
just because our eyes don’t see them properly.

There have been many moments in my long years of learning from Rudolf G. Wagner, first in the Sandgasse, then in the Akademiestraße and then in the Vossstraße at the Cluster, HCTS and CATS, when Rudolf made me realize that I had not looked closely enough, that I had not seen the importance of seeing that which (his favorite translation of *suo* 所) was perhaps not visible immediately and at all times. He taught me the importance of always looking closely, of looking twice, even three times, of listening carefully, of testing and feeling my way mindfully. His advice helped me sustain moments of despair (so very common in every scholar’s daily life: when you cannot find what you are looking for, or when you cannot think of the next sentence).

Waxing and waning, like the moon, going back and forth between not just Harvard and Heidelberg, but Taipei and Beijing and a variety of other places, too, Rudolf Wagner has been a constant presence to many of us nevertheless, his frequent emails „Get this! Read this! Buy this!” remain an unceasing inspiration. He has made us fly, extend our wings, on the one hand – expand our visions and trajectories – while getting grounded and finding a home for our soul, on the other (as in that last verse of a poem by Joseph von Eichendorff, *Mondnacht – Moonlit Night*: “Und meine Seele spannte, weit ihre Flügel aus, flog durch die stillen Lande, als flöge sie nach Haus.”). How has he done this? By fostering a spirit of openness, of discussion and often fierce, but always fair debate – full of bonmots, in the truest sense of the word – that involved the body and mind and that always included good food, good music, good art. He made us go to Théâtre du Soleil, he took us to exhibitions of panopticons and much more, and he always reminded us: „Never forget the Heidelberg Opera House!” He taught us multiple – and always intensive – ways of seeing, feeling, hearing. He was, in other words, not unlike the typical inspiring host of a lively, liberal-minded salon, one who refined our tastes and increased our knowledge through never-ending witty, spirited, ingenious and authentic conversation.

And that is why, on the occasion of his 77th birthday, we held a first CATS-Salon to remind ourselves of that useful tradition that Rudolf G. Wagner had established in Heidelberg. Indeed, his private salons had taken place in many different places: his huge but crammed office in the Akademiestraße, room 205, for example, where we (that is, his expansive group of doctoral and postdoctoral students, including, occasionally, Peter) would meet every second Friday at 4 pm, for the “Colloquium”, to discuss almost anything from hermeneutics to superscribing religion in Taiwan, from postcolonial theory and its enemies to Maoist guerilla strategies, and we would get into heated discussions about text and commentary and public spheres in China and beyond, only to be cut short by his final verdict around 6...: “Now I am throwing you out: I have to go play squash.”

There were other salons, too, those that would take place once a semester, up in his house in Ziegelhausen, with its spectacular view of *shan* 山 and *shui* 水, mountains and rivers, and accompanied, always, by a sumptuous selection of delicious foods and drinks and habitually ending in a brisk and invigorating walk in the forest – all the while, prodded gently by Cathy’s inquisitory – “So what are you working on currently?”

The Wagner salons, were out “both to please and to educate” *aut delectare aut prodesse* as Horace would have put it, they were important places for the exchange and the grooming of ideas, not unlike those salons that at one point had started to arise in Italy in the 16th century, and then flourished in France throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, from where began their global travels, through Asia and Europe.

The strange Chinese creature *shalong* 沙龙 is a phonetic transliteration of salon. The two characters *sha* 沙, “sand”, and *long* 龍, “dragon”, do not actually tell us anything useful: the Chinese *shalong* is inspired by Chinese travellers to Paris, by readings of Baudelaire and others, and it arrives in China some time in the early 20th century, and is first practiced in Shanghai, the place that has become so important to Rudolf’s work, indeed – and to the present day, one can say, this Chinese *shalong* is part of that Chinese public sphere that Rudolf Wagner has spent so many years researching. There is a *shalong* tradition in China that begins in the late 19th century and runs throughout with highpoints in the 1930s and 40s, the 1960s and 70s – during the Cultural Revolution, with some underground *shalong* – where misty poetry, which later become the rage in the 1980s, is engendered – while some of them apparently even met more officially, in the State Council and the Ministry of Railways of all places – and here we see how, as theatres of conversation and exchange, these *salons* in China indeed played a critical role in the emergence of the Chinese public sphere. Just like the press which has been studied so closely by Rudolf G. Wagner, and other institutions of sociability, like the courtesan houses, that Catherine Vance Yeh has researched, these salons, too, were part of *The Chinese Republic of Letters*. They would not always be in cultural-political contrast to the state (something that Habermas regrets), and would sometimes even include it. And so there were different types of salons, not just during the Cultural Revolution, secret or open, while their membership changed constantly as writers and other intellectuals moved back and forth from the countryside or found work in the cities. The culture fever of the 1980s is produced in part by the foundation of many an artistic and avantgarde *shalong* where contemporary art, experimental theatre, and rock music was produced, and hundreds of theoretical works by authors, from Heinrich Wölfflin to Jacques Derrida were discussed and translated. At the same time, there was a *Dangwei shuji shalong* 党委书记沙龙, the “CCP secretaries’ salon”, and with reform efforts since the 1990s we find even more *shalong*: the Fudan Student University Café is called *Dajia Shalong* 大家沙龙, “Everybody’s salon”, for example.

The content and form of the salon to some extent defines its character and historical importance but surely we can say that they have always been the heart of different processes of enlightenment and, as the original salon-tradition, in China, too, Wagners’s different salons always

already involved some (more or less) brilliant minds – and not just men, but also many women, the salonnieres, who were expected, ideally, to run and moderate the conversation (he probably learned from his childhood experience he had always been surrounded by three sisters, and probably had his private salon with them). CATS as a Collaboratorium opens ample of space for the kinds of conversations that we all learned from Rudolf's salons and we will continue to engage in these discussions, one part of which is this collection of volumes.

There are many who would have liked to be included in this collection of volumes, but in the end did not quite make it. Their names shall stand here for many more who are indebted to the salon-like-spirit that Rudolf G. Wagner offered to Sinology and beyond: Marianne Bastid-Bruguière, Ulrike Middendorf, Lorenz Bichler and Melanie Trede, Chen Fongfong, Lena Henningsen, Christian Henriot, Michel Hockx, Tonio and Fernande Hölscher, Marja Kaikkonen, Martin Kern, Ulrich Lau, Lung Ying-tai, Michael Lüdke, Gotelind Müller-Saini, Göran Malmqvist, Glenn Most, Suzanne Ogden, Wolfgang Schamoni, Anja Senz, Edward Shaughnessy, Andreas Steen, Michael Szony, Hans van Ess, Hans Ulrich Vogel, Barbara Volkmar, Robert Weller, Marc Winter, Xiong Yuezhi 熊月之, Xu Xing and Guo Guo, Yeh Wen-hsin ... and many others who remain unnamed.